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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0881  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2880  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2265  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000373

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ OPPOSITION KURULTAI CALLS FOR UNITY, CHANGE

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11. (SBU) Summary: The April 12 kurultai, or "people's gathering," delivered few surprises, as presentations focused on the government's "poor" performance since the March 2005 "revolution." Issues of concern included rising unemployment, the "illegal" October 2007 constitutional referendum and December 2007 parliamentary elections, the "opaque" energy sector privatization process, and Kyrgyzstan's overall "lack" of economic and political development. Over 1500 political party delegates, mostly pensioners representing Ata Meken, NGOs, and non-party-affiliated citizens participated; none of the invited government officials attended. The kurultai's resolution called for the government to meet nine demands "soon," ranging from declaring the parliamentary elections illegal, to stopping the privatization of energy firms -- or there would be public disobedience and protests. End Summary.

#### The March of the Pensioners

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12. (SBU) Prior to the kurultai, approximately 400 political party delegates, mostly pensioners representing the main opposition Ata Meken party, assembled peacefully at a park adjacent to Bishkek's central sports stadium. Other political parties present at the pre-meeting included Ar Namys, Ak Shumkar, Asaba, and the Greens. A handful of onlookers, who may have simply been enjoying a beautiful Saturday morning in the park, surrounded the gathering. The assembly was treated to patriotic hymns and free opposition newspapers, but there were no speeches. Poloff counted less than 30 uniformed officers around the park, directing traffic away from the area.

13. (SBU) The group moved en masse to the stadium's main entrance, where they joined at least 1500 additional delegates, NGO representatives, and invited guests inside the stadium's main hall. While taking their seats, musicians sang politically charged solos on stage, apparently unrehearsed. Once seated, former Foreign Minister, opposition For Justice coordinator, and kurultai moderator Alikbek Jekshenkulov opened the meeting, noting that most of the

people expected came, except for the invited government officials. He then read out a list of the political parties represented, amounting to far more than the number observed voting for unification towards the end of the kurultai.

#### Grim Reports

14. (SBU) All four of the main speakers -- Ata Meken's Omurbek Tekebayev and Temir Sariyev, public parliament "speaker" Abdygany Erkebayev, and Jekshenkulov -- addressed the Bakiyev administration's "disappointing" performance since the March 2005 "revolution." In his speech, Tekebayev focused on increasing external migration, as Kyrgyz workers seek better opportunities abroad, despite the potentially life-threatening risks involved. He also noted the sense of despair felt by most, claiming that the number of suicides has risen over the past three years. Both Tekebayev and Sariyev pointed to corruption as the main obstacle to development, with Tekebayev blaming government mismanagement for the country's energy problems. Tekebayev further insisted that the individuals who caused the energy "crisis" now have leading positions in the government, likening PM Chudinov, Bishkek Mayor Usenov, and Speaker of Parliament Madumarov to "merchants in a bazaar" interested only in short-term financial gain. He finally called for systemic change in the government, in addition to replacing Kyrgyzstan's leaders with more "honest" and "competent" people.

15. (SBU) Sariyev added that economic development has been slow because of government interference in private business. He said that Kyrgyzstan currently faces a \$2 billion trade deficit, with imports vastly exceeding exports, and claimed that 30% of the state budget was stolen by corrupt officials each year, according to "experts." Sariyev promised that the "public parliament" would develop an economic development plan that would increase state

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support to farmers, establish strong public control over the state budget, create business-friendly tax policies; and commoditize water resources. He warned that, if such measures aren't taken immediately, inflation would surpass GDP growth exponentially.

16. (SBU) Both Erkebayev and Jekshenkulov addressed generally the government's "inability" to expand Kyrgyzstan's democratic potential. Erkebayev specifically noted that none of Bakiyev's promises were upheld after the "revolution," and that the country is now "worse off" than it had been under former President Akayev. He lambasted the consolidation of the legislature and judiciary under Bakiyev's "full control," and claimed that the ruling Ak Jol party was created too quickly, and illegally. Erkebayev also criticized Bakiyev for not relinquishing control of state media outlets to the public, and called for further revisions to the constitution to ensure political stability.

17. (SBU) Jekshenkulov, focusing on Kyrgyzstan's growing "demoralization," claimed that a "culture-less" society has developed, and that people have been forced to tolerate corruption, criminality, and unchecked "hooliganism." He charged that the privatization of universities would drive teachers to seek menial jobs or leave the country altogether, creating a country that would resemble a "rootless tree." Jekshenkulov claimed that the government has ignored areas outside the capital, especially the impoverished South, which was inciting regionalism and a growing North-South divide. He then called for all citizens to unite under a national development plan that would exploit advantageously the country's "abundant" resources.

#### Open Mic

18. (SBU) Following the four main presentations, the floor was given to political party representatives who similarly focused on energy sector privatization, rising unemployment, the "false" referendum and parliamentary elections, and the parliament's April 11 ratification of the agreement on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh state border, originally signed by both countries in 2001. The impassioned

presentations ranged from the serious to the outrageous, with one delegate making the assertion that increased homosexuality ("even amongst ethnic Kyrgyz") exemplifies the ongoing demoralization of the country, initiated after Bakiyev took office. Others called for unification of the opposition, governmental decentralization, and a renewed focus on curbing corruption. The biggest applause came whenever a speaker questioned the legality of the sitting parliament and the Bakiyev administration's ability to develop the country successfully.

#### The Ultimatum

¶9. (SBU) The kurultai ended with ex-MP and opposition Asaba party leader Azimbek Beknazarov calling all political parties represented to vote for unification, and reading aloud the organizers' final resolution. Nine demands were listed, to be met by the government "soon," or else face acts of public disobedience and demonstrations. The resolution demanded the government take immediate measures to address rising food prices; declare the government's performance unsatisfactory; declare the constitution and election code, passed via the October 2007 referendum, illegitimate; pronounce the sitting parliament illegitimate, hold new parliamentary elections, and declare all laws and decisions passed by the current parliament illegal; bring criminal charges against members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), and its Chair, for their roles during the referendum and elections; disband the CEC and install a new commission with political party and opposition representation, before the upcoming municipal and "early" parliamentary elections; stop the privatization of energy firms and educational institutions, and the sale of Kyrgyz land; refrain from signing into law the previously agreed transfer of land to Kazakhstan, which was ratified by Parliament on April 11; and lift all restrictions on public

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demonstrations, in addition to stopping the pressure exerted on the media.

#### Comment

¶10. (SBU) The government and security forces largely ignored the gathering, and the meeting proceeded peacefully. The kurultai offered few surprises, and opposition leaders have voiced these and similar demands previously. Kurultai organizers understand that the government is not likely to meet their demands, but it remains to be seen whether they can follow through with their threats of later public disobedience and demonstrations.

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